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**WEST EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION WIDELY PESSIMISTIC ON START;  
TENDS TO PREFER ICBM REDUCTIONS TO A FREEZE**

This is the second report presenting results from USIA-commissioned national public opinion surveys conducted between October 8 and 30 in Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Personal interviews with about 1000 adults were conducted in each country by reputable firms--mostly Gallup affiliates. They were completed before the death of Leonid Brezhnev and after the change of government in West Germany.

Summary:

West European public opinion on START differs little from views on INF negotiations: many are unaware of the strategic arms talks and there is widespread doubt they will succeed. While slightly more prefer negotiating reductions in ICBM forces to a freeze at current levels, few are aware that the U.S. favors reductions.

End SummaryMany West Europeans Unaware of START

Majorities of the public in France (68%), Britain (64%), and West Germany (58%) are not aware that the U.S. and the Soviet Union are "currently holding negotiations to reduce the number of intercontinental (nuclear) missiles." In the Netherlands and Italy substantial minorities (36% and 44%) have not heard or read of START.

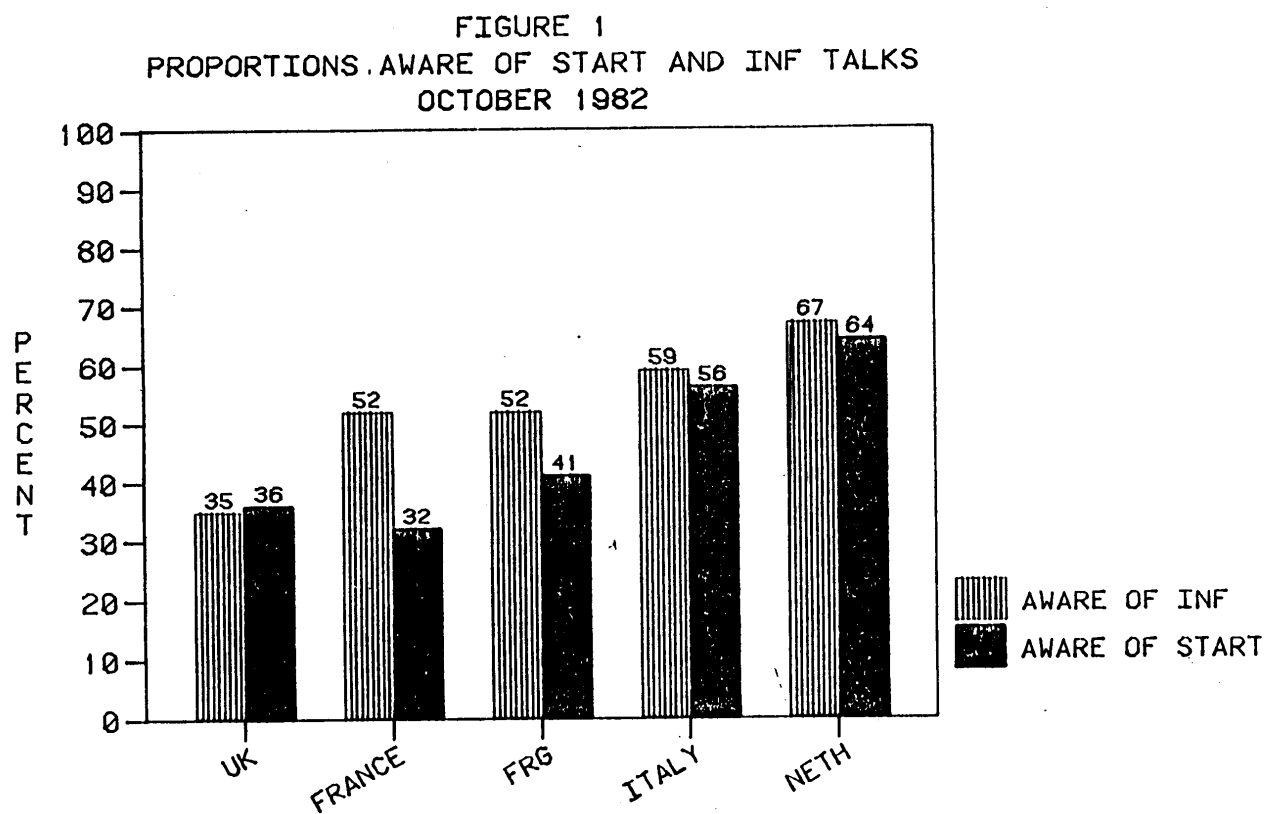
Not surprisingly, in West Germany, and in France as well, START is less widely known than the INF talks. Elsewhere, however, as many claim to be aware of START as of INF negotiations (Figure 1).

Few Believe START Will Succeed

In keeping with a widespread skepticism of superpower sincerity in seeking nuclear arms reductions\*, generally about one

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\* See "West European Publics Pessimistic on INF Arms Control Talks," M-11/29/82.



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in five thinks it likely that the superpowers "will agree to reduce the number of their intercontinental nuclear missiles in the next two or three years." Majorities of the public in every country (55%-to-67%), and even more among the better-educated, are pessimistic that talks will succeed.

For one thing, both Washington and Moscow are seen as more likely "to be rigid and to stick to (their) own positions in arms control talks" than "to be flexible and willing to compromise." Rigidity is more widely expected from the Soviet Union (from 54%-to-70%), but it is also the prevailing view everywhere about the U.S. negotiating stance (from 42%-to-53%).

Views are mixed on whether the U.S. expects the USSR to make ICBM reductions "that are unfair to the Soviet Union." In West Germany, as many (46%) agree that cuts proposed by the U.S. would be unfair to the USSR as disagree (47%). In the Netherlands and Italy, opinion is also split (25%-30% range). But in the UK and France, people tend not to believe that the U.S. seeks to take advantage of the Soviets in negotiating ICBM reductions. And sizable proportions (35%-45% range) everywhere but Germany do not offer an opinion on this score.

Predictably, expectations about the Soviet Union are even bleaker. European publics generally believe it is unlikely that the USSR will reduce its nuclear arsenals through negotiations:

- o A majority (58%) in West Germany and pluralities (34%-49%) in Britain, France, and Italy agree that the USSR "is not willing to make the reductions necessary so that the number of Soviet intercontinental nuclear missiles equal the number of such U.S. missiles."
- o In the Netherlands, uncertainty on this score prevails (43%). The others split about evenly between agreement (31%) and disagreement (26%) with this proposition.

#### Reducing ICBM Force Narrowly Favored Over A Freeze

Despite the skepticism about reductions, European public opinion tends to favor reductions over a freeze as most likely to prevent war:

- o Given a choice between these two negotiating approaches, pluralities (50% range) in the Netherlands, West Germany, Italy and Britain prefer that the U.S. and USSR "agree to reduce the number of nuclear warheads and intercontinental missiles on both sides to equal levels."

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But large minorities in West Germany (40%), Italy (37%), and the Netherlands (31%) would rather have Washington and Moscow "agree to stop producing nuclear weapons and freeze the numbers of their nuclear warheads and intercontinental missiles at their present levels."

- o In France, the reductions approach is endorsed by a 35-to-19 percent margin, but nearly half (46%) offer no opinion on the issue.

However, there is widespread confusion or unawareness of which of these approaches the U.S. favors. Majorities (60%-80% range) in every country either don't know, or, more significantly, believe the U.S. favors a freeze plan (about one-fifth). From 21 percent in France to 37 percent in the Netherlands are aware that the U.S. proposed reductions to equal levels.

In fact, in West Germany (and France as well) as many believe the U.S. favors a freeze as think the U.S. favors reductions. This misperception is especially prevalent among well-educated Germans (46%).

In evaluating these arms control approaches, most West Europeans think either that the Soviet Union has more ICBMs than the U.S. or that both countries have about the same number:

- o Soviet ICBM superiority is the majority view (55%) in Britain and the prevailing view (41%) in the Netherlands. About 20 percent in these two countries believe both have the same number.
- o In France, West Germany, and Italy, opinion divides between Soviet numerical superiority and perceived equivalence.
- o Only about one-in-ten in any country believe the U.S. has an ICBM edge.

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